

INDONESIA SAYS USING 'QUIET DIPLOMACY' TO HELP SOLVE MYANMAR CRISIS

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MEDIA MATTERS

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MYANMAR JUNTA PLAYS GAMES WITH PEOPLE'S LIVES

Myanmar's illegal military junta continues to play games with the lives of its citizens. Just one such game was last week's amnesty for 2,153 political prisoners, released, as they said, "for the peaceful mind of the people and on humanitarian grounds" on the occasion of a Buddhist holiday.

Those pardoned had been jailed under Section 505 (a) of the penal code, which outlaws any action deemed to undermine the military. The law carries a maximum jail term of three years.

Naturally, the released prisoners and their families and friends will have felt relief on being set free.

And there was some surprise that political prisoners had been let out, not just plain criminals as happened during the last amnesty on Myanmar New Year's Day. That raised some eyebrows.

But out of the 21,000 people arrested since the 2021 coup, this still leaves 17,800 people still behind bars, including former civilian government leaders Aung San Suu Kyi and Win Myint – both incarcerated for decades, life sentences in fact.

The Myanmar military junta uses prisoners as pawns on a chessboard, seeking to maintain its façade of power, making the population dependent on its ability to choose incarceration for its opponents – even death if the right law can be used.

The sad fact remains that many of the people swept up in the clampdowns over the last couple of years really did little that could be considered wrong – some ar-

rested for a comment or post on Facebook, others just being in the wrong place at the wrong time and forced under torture to admit to a crime.

Other pawns in the game include former members of the elected National League for Democracy-led who were arrested on the morning of the coup, or were picked up in hiding weeks or months after.

That game-playing includes the political trumped-up charges and sentences brought against The Lady and the former president. Judging by the process that saw these two put away for life – life given the length of their sentence and due to their age – the game was to destroy Myanmar's democracy icons and throw away the key. Little is known about the conditions they are being held in but for 77-year-old Aung San Suu Kyi it is a far cry from the lakeside house arrest she endured before the military edged open the door to a "disciplined democracy" well over a decade ago.

While commentators said any release of prisoners is welcome for the individuals and their families, last week's release does not represent any sort of concession as thousands of political prisoners remain incarcerated for opposing the junta and arrests continue.

The Myanmar's leader Min Aung Hlaing is fooling no one with his prisoner amnesties. It is like the image of a cruel king throwing scraps of food on the ground for the hungry to gobble up, an action of disdain towards a people fearful and angry over his barbaric rule.

EDITORIAL

mizzima WEEKLY

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MIZZIMA MAGAZINE

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IN FOCUS





ON ALMS ROUND

Myanmar Buddhist nuns walk in the heat on their alms round on a street in Yangon last week.

Photo: AFP

GUERRILLA FORCES BOMB MYANMAR JUNTA ARTILLERY REGIMENT BASE AND CHECKPOINT

Local guerilla forces carried out drone attacks on armoured vehicle garages in the compound of Field Artillery Regiment 6005 and a checkpoint in front of the base, in Sagaing Township's Ohntaw Village.

Five drones dropped five bombs during the attack at about 3:00 p.m. on 29 April, according to an official from the Unicorn Guerrilla Force, one of the guerrilla groups involved in the attack.

He said "We prepared six drones, but one could not be used due to some problems before the mission. So, we dropped five bombs from five drones. We hit the targets and some damage likely occurred, but we still have not received detailed information [about casualties and damage inflicted]."

Mizzima is currently trying to find out about casualty numbers and damage inflicted by the attack.

The guerrilla forces attacked the checkpoint outside the army base as well as the base because junta soldiers had been using the checkpoint on the

Shwebo to Mandalay highway to extort drivers and carry out searches of vehicles.

The Unicorn Guerrilla Force official said: "We carefully conducted the attack so as not to hit people and their vehicles."

Later the same day, 29 April, at 6:00 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. the guerrilla forces used four drones to drop up to 10 bombs on to Marlataw, another village in Sagaing Township, that has been taken over by the Pyu Saw Htee junta-aligned militia, according to the Unicorn Guerrilla Force who also said Pyu Saw Htee members may have died in the attacks.

The attacks were jointly carried out by, amongst others: the Unicorn Guerrilla Force, the Anyar Brothers Coalition Force, Phoenix (SGG), Myinmu Revolution Force (MMRF), Young Wolf, Fight For Federalism, Thunder Bird, Middle Revolutionary Technical Force, and the Sagaing Township People's Defense Force.

ADVANCE SALE OF APARTMENTS ON MILITARY LAND RAISES OVER \$6 MILLION FOR NUG

The advance sale of apartments that will be built on military-owned land in Yangon once the Myanmar junta is defeated raised \$6.06 million USD within 12 hours of sales starting at 8:30 p.m. on 29 April.

The apartments, which will be part of the Spring Inya Apartment Project will be built on 30 acres of military-owned land on Parami Road in Yangon City.

The sale has been organised for the shadow National Unity Government (NUG) by the fundraising group The End of Dictatorship.

A total of 750 one, two and three-bedroom apartments have been offered for sale.

The apartments are being sold with a 60-year lease. After the original lease expires it can then be renewed every 10 years with government approval.

The apartments can be purchased and owned by foreigners. After the revolution laws will be passed to ensure that foreigners can legally own the apartments.

Buyers of the apartments will have to pay 40 per cent of the apartments' value immediately and will have to pay the remaining 60 per cent after the junta has been defeated and deposed.

Apartments can be bought from End of Dictatorship representatives in different countries, including Canada, Brunei, Thailand, Singapore, Korea, and Denmark.

The sale of these apartments marks the second stage of the End of Dictatorship's Spring Yangon Phase III project.

AID GIVEN TO DISPLACED FAMILIES IN DAWEI DISTRICT

The Dawei Democracy Movement Strike Committee (DDMSC) distributed 4.4 million kyats of food aid to 250 conflict-affected families in Aukkyaukwut Village, in Thanintharyi Region's Launglon Township.

The organisation said that it had provided essential food products such as rice, oil, and onions to families who were displaced when they had to flee their homes in April because of the armed conflict.

The Dawei Democracy Movement Strike Committee (DDMSC) is based in Dawei District's Launglon Township.

More than 7,000 people have been displaced by fighting in Tanintharyi Region since the military coup two years ago, according to the Myanmar Peace Monitor.

MAGWAY REGION LANDMINE ATTACK ON MYANMAR JUNTA CONVOY

Landmines planted by Yezagyo People's Defense Force (PDF) in Magway Region's Yezagyo Township hit a junta military convoy killing at least three junta soldiers and injuring many others, according to the PDF.

Six mines planted on the Pakokku to Yezagyo highway were detonated as a convoy, of about 40 soldiers from junta Infantry Battalion 258 was passing in three vehicles on the morning of 30 April.

"We attacked the convoy while it was passing through Kyee Kan and Kan Thit villages. The middle vehicle struck the mine, which then lifted it into the

air. According to eyewitnesses two military personnel were killed. I think, there could be more than just two deaths. More than 10 soldiers were injured", said a Yezagyo PDF representative.

Following the attack junta soldiers launched random attacks in nearby areas, but the PDF fighters managed to retreat without suffering any injuries.

Since the attack, the junta army has sent extra troops to reinforce its Yezagyo Township base and it has also deployed troops in different areas of the Yezagyo Town.

MYANMAR JUNTA KILLS 55 WOMEN IN APRIL

The Myanmar junta killed 55 women and detained a further 43 women in the month of April, according to a Burmese Women's Union (BWU) report on 2 May.

Women were killed in six states and regions. The majority of those happened in the 11 April airstrike on Pazigy Village in Kantbalu Township, when 45 women were killed.

The women were killed by the junta in various ways, including artillery fire into IDP camps, airstrikes and torture during interrogation, according to Ma Zu Zu, the BWU Joint Secretary.

She said: "Among the 55 deceased women, there were the women who were shot and killed when the military junta raided their houses."

The 43 detained women were arrested in

different areas. Many were arrested for posting condolences online for the victims of the Pazigy Village massacre.

The conditions in prison are not good for women. "Women in prisons do not get enough healthcare. In addition, they do not get prisoners' rights. They are prohibited from receiving gifts or visits from family members", said Ma Zu Zu.

She also said that detained women were sexually exploited and abused both physically and verbally by junta personnel.

According to the Myanmar Women's Union, since the February 2021 coup until 28 April 2023, there have been 3,390 women detained and arrested. Of those, 819 have been sentenced and 513 have died.



Myanmar journalists risk life and limb to report on the Myanmar crisis post-coup. Photo: Jhin

MEDIA MATTERS

**Independent media houses work
hard to tell the Myanmar story**

Last week, we were reminded of the efforts of journalists and independent media houses to cover the Myanmar crisis in the wake of the 2021 military coup as the world marked World Press Freedom Day.

Journalists covering the crisis in Myanmar face numerous challenges, including safety concerns and dangers of arrest, limited access to information, funding and resource constraints, and the spread of misinformation and propaganda. Despite these challenges, many journalists continue to report on the situation, often at great personal risk, to keep the world informed about the ongoing crisis.

The sad truth for crisis-torn Myanmar is that it ranks third in the list of the worst offenders in jailing journalists, just behind Iran and China, and ahead of Turkey.

POOR STANDING

Myanmar catapulted into the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) census rankings as the world's second-worst jailer of journalists in 2021, when the February military coup ousted the country's elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and cracked down on coverage of the new regime.

The number of Myanmar journalists known to be jailed in December 2022 is at least 40 – up from a revised 30 the year before – as the regime doubled

down on its efforts to mute reporters and disrupt the country's few remaining independent media outlets, according to CPJ.

CRACKDOWN

In the immediate wake of the coup, independent media organizations such as Mizzima, Irrawaddy and DVB were forced to close their offices and go underground in the country and work in exile, continuing their quest to provide news and insight for their audience – both local and international.

CPJ says many news organizations remain reluctant to identify their detained staff and freelancers to avoid the harsher sentences often meted out to journalists.

Nearly half of those detained were sentenced in 2022, most under an anti-state provision that broadly penalizes “incitement” and “false news.” In another case in November, journalist Myo San Soe was sentenced to 15 years in prison on terrorism charges for contacting members of People's Defense Forces, an array of insurgent groups fighting the junta.

PERSONAL THREAT

The situation in Myanmar is highly volatile, with frequent violence and junta crackdowns on protests or any other sign of dissent. Journalists covering the crisis face the risk of physical harm or arrest while reporting from the ground. Several journalists



A number of journalists are reportedly incarcerated in Insein Prison in Yangon. Photo: AFP



The threats to journalists in the badlands of Myanmar are all too real. Photo: Mizzima

have been detained or assaulted by the security forces, while others have been forced to go into hiding to avoid persecution.

The junta has imposed strict restrictions on the flow of information, including internet shutdowns and censorship of social media platforms. This makes it difficult for journalists to access reliable sources of information and communicate with their colleagues. Furthermore, the government has also placed restrictions on the movement of journalists, making it difficult to report from the ground.

Independent news organizations covering the crisis may face financial constraints, making it difficult to maintain a presence on the ground or to provide in-depth reporting. Additionally, journalists may lack access to necessary resources, such as proper equipment or protective gear, to cover the crisis safely and effectively.

MISINFORMATION

In addition, the military junta has been accused of spreading misinformation and propaganda to justify their actions and discredit the Spring Revolution and pro-democracy movement. This can make it difficult for journalists to distinguish between fact and fiction and report accurately on the situation. Many People's Defence Forces (PDF) use social media to announce news of their actions in the field, yet the information can be hard to confirm.

REGIONAL RANKING

Myanmar is sadly listed on a regional level with China and Vietnam as having the highest number

of imprisoned journalists – a total of 119, as of last year.

Vietnam, which holds 21, shows little tolerance for independent journalism, invoking tough sentences for those convicted of anti-state crimes. In October, it sentenced Le Manh Ha to eight years in prison, to be followed by five years of house arrest; in August it sentenced blogger Le Anh Hung to five years for “abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the state, organizations and individuals,” CPJ reports. Among other detainees are Pham Doan Trang, a winner of a CPJ International Press Freedom Award in 2022. Trang is serving a nine-year prison sentence under a law that bans making or spreading news against the state.

India, with seven journalists in jail, continues to draw criticism over its treatment of the media, in particular its use of the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act, a preventive detention law, to keep Kashmiri journalists Aasif Sultan, Fahad Shah, and Sajad Gul behind bars after they were granted court-ordered bail in separate cases.

For journalists covering the Myanmar crisis, it is clear that conflicts and crackdowns in the country are ratcheting up, with the junta attempting to score points ahead of the rainy season, and the National Unity Government (NUG) recently declaring they are switching from a “defensive war” to an “offensive war” as the PDFs step up attacks.

For the reporters operating on the ground in the badlands of Myanmar, the threats are all too real.

MIZZIMA FREELANCE REPORTER RELEASED IN MYANMAR JUNTA PRISONER AMNESTY



Nyein Nyein Aye in Yangon.
Photo: Facebook

Mizzima's freelance reporter Nyein Nyein Aye (aka Mabel) was released under the Myanmar junta prisoner amnesty marking Buddhist traditional Kason Full Moon Day, 3 May, according to her family members.

The junta granted amnesty to 2,153 political prisoners on 3 May, according to a statement by the junta.

"The phone rang a few minutes ago. I was very happy to hear her [Nyein's] voice. She was released. She said that she would come to Yangon in her friend's car. Today is her birthday, so it's really memorable," a family member of Nyein told Mizzima.

According to a family member, Mabel was experiencing heatstroke and stomach pain, and had undergone toe surgery.

She was detained on January 15, 2022, and under Section 505(a), she received a sentence of

three years in Insein Prison. She was one of those individuals who were abruptly moved to Thayarwaddy Prison in September.

She was released from prison after serving more than two years and three months in prison for her journalism work with the stipulation that if she commits the same crime again, she will have to carry out the remaining sentence under Section 401 of the Criminal Code.

A photojournalist from Myanmar Pressphoto Agency, Kaung Set Lin, and a reporter from Mizzima Media, Kyaw Swar Tun, may also have been released by the Military Council as part of the 2,153 prisoners release, said to have been sentences in accordance with Section 505(a) of the Penal Code.

ONE-PARTY REGIMES INCLUDING MYANMAR DAMNED FOR THEIR MEDIA CONTROLS



Zaw Tun, a freelance journalist recently freed in a prisoner amnesty speaks on the phone to a friend. Photo: EPA

Myanmar is one of several of Asia's one-party states and dictatorships to be criticized by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) as the NGO marked World Press Freedom Day this week and laid out a ranking of countries.

Sclerotic one-party regimes, media control by oligarchs, including poorly-ranked North Korea (180th), China (179th), Vietnam (178th), Myanmar (173rd) when it comes to press freedom, sour the media landscape in Asia, according to RSF.

Asia's one-party states and dictatorships are the ones that constrict journalism most, regimes with leaders who have continued to tighten their totalitarian grip on the public discourse. Starting with Xi Jinping, who secured a historic third term as China's leader with a concentration of power without precedent since Mao Zedong, and has used it to pursue the crusade he launched against journalism 10 years ago.

With the result that China is the world's biggest jailer of journalists and press freedom defenders, closely followed by Myanmar, which has become a black hole for

news and information ever since the military seized control in a coup on 1 February 2021.

The RSF says the other phenomenon that dangerously restricts the free flow of news and information is the acquisition of media outlets by oligarchs with close links with political leaders. This is particularly the case in "hybrid" regimes such as India (161st), where all the mainstream media are now owned by wealthy businessmen close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. At the same time, Modi has an army of supporters who track down all online reporting regarded as critical of the government and wage horrific harassment campaigns against the sources. Caught between these two forms of extreme pressure, many journalists are, in practice, forced to censor themselves.

The same trend is to be found in Bangladesh (163rd) and Cambodia (147th), where governmental persecution of independent media has intensified in the run-up to elections that are due to be held in the coming months.

RSF says another regional specificity is the persistence of issues and subjects which are re-

garded as off-limits and therefore prevent journalists from working freely. This is clearly the case in Afghanistan (152nd), where the Taliban government tolerates no straying from their fanatical version of the Sharia and where women journalists are in the process of being literally erased from the media landscape. The media also know that targeting the sovereign too directly is very risky in such countries as Bhutan (90th), Thailand (106th) and the sultanate of Brunei (142nd).

On the other hand, changes of government loosened constraints on the media in Pakistan (150th) and the Philippines (132nd), even if these two countries continue to be among the world's most dangerous countries for journalists. The replacement of one party or coalition in government by another also explains why such countries as Sri Lanka (135th), Malaysia (73rd) and Australia (27th) have risen in the Index.

At the upper end of the Index, functional democracies such as Taiwan (35th), Samoa (19th) and New Zealand (13th) have enhanced their status as regional press freedom models. One of this year's surprises is the entry of Timor-Leste, a young democracy still under construction, into the Index's top ten. It is a positive confirmation of the earlier observation about one-party regimes. Excessive, overly concentrated power is the main obstacle to journalistic freedom. It is when political, economic and judicial powers are balanced and regulated that press freedom can fully flourish.

INDONESIA SAYS USING 'QUIET DIPLOMACY' TO HELP SOLVE MYANMAR CRISIS



Jakarta. Photo: Eko Herwantoro

Indonesia is using “quiet diplomacy” to speak with all sides of the Myanmar conflict and spur renewed peace efforts in the violence-racked country, its foreign minister said Friday.

Myanmar has been riven by unrest since the military putsch that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi’s government in February 2021, with the junta’s bloody crackdown on dissent sparking social unrest and an economic crisis.

Indonesia, Southeast Asia’s biggest economy and this year’s chair of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc, is hoping to kickstart a five-point plan agreed with the Myanmar junta two years ago after mediation attempts to end violence failed.

“In the early stages of its chairmanship, Indonesia decided

to take a non-megaphone diplomacy approach,” Retno Marsudi told a press conference.

“The aim is to provide space for the parties to build trust. Quiet diplomacy doesn’t mean Indonesia doesn’t do anything.”

She said Jakarta’s diplomacy since the start of the year included 60 engagements with all sides of the conflict that would “hopefully become capital for further efforts” to solve the crisis.

Those included Myanmar’s shadow government made up of mostly ousted opponents of the junta, the military-appointed government and ethnic minority armed groups.

A foreign ministry official told AFP that every ASEAN member was informed of the talks with all parties.

Her comments came ahead of the first of two annual ASEAN leaders summits hosted by chair Indonesia - with the first taking place next week on the island of Flores, to which Myanmar’s junta has not been invited.

The five-point plan calls for an end to violence and for talks between the military and the rebels but the junta has largely ignored it, resulting in it being barred from top-level summits.

The bloc, criticised for its inaction over the deepening crisis, condemned the military last month for air strikes in the central Sagaing region that reportedly killed dozens of people.

AFP

MYANMAR'S NUG OFFICIAL HOLDS VIRTUAL MEETING WITH FORMER UN SECRETARY GENERAL BAN KI-MOON



Ban Ki-moon. Photo: EPA

Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) held a productive exchange of perspectives with former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a virtual meeting on 27 April, according to a press release on 30 April.

Ban visited Naypyidaw to talk with the Myanmar military junta and its leader Min Aung Hlaing on 23- 24 April. The member of The Elders group came in for criticism over his visit.

The following is an edited version of the NUG statement:

1. Deputy Minister U Moe Zaw Oo of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the National Unity Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar had a virtual meeting with Mr Ban Ki-moon, Deputy Chair of the Elders and former Secretary-General of the United Nations on 27th April 2023.

2. The meeting centred

around Mr Ban Ki-moon's recent visit to Myanmar and involved a productive exchange of perspectives on how to effectively move forward to address the current crisis facing Myanmar.

3. In the meeting, Deputy Minister U Moe Zaw Oo expressed his appreciation for the insights shared by Mr Ban Ki-moon, particularly on the significance of finding "a path to an end to violence" and "the importance of all parties playing a role in securing a lasting solution, including the National Unity Government". Despite Mr Ban Ki-moon's sincere intentions for his recent visit to Myanmar, Deputy Minister expressed his concern that the junta may seek to exploit this visit for their own advantage.

Accordingly, he requested that any further visits to Myanmar be made in consultation with important stakeholders in Myanmar,

including the National Unity Government. The Deputy Minister also pointed out that the military junta has no right to hold elections and that elections should be conducted according to the newly drafted constitution that is acceptable to all stakeholders and to all ethnic groups in Myanmar. Furthermore, the Deputy Minister underscored the need for more coordinated pressure and sanctions from the international community on the military junta which has failed to abide by the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus and the Security Council Resolution 2669.

4. The meeting concluded with an agreement to establish a collaborative working relationship to discuss potential pathways towards resolving the ongoing crisis in Myanmar.

CHINA FM MEETS JUNTA CHIEF IN MYANMAR, VOWS SUPPORT

China's foreign minister met Myanmar's junta chief in Naypyidaw on Tuesday last week, officials said, the highest-ranking Chinese official to meet the country's top general since a coup more than two years ago.

Myanmar has been riven by violence since the putsch that ousted Aung San Suu Kyi's gov-

ernment in February 2021.

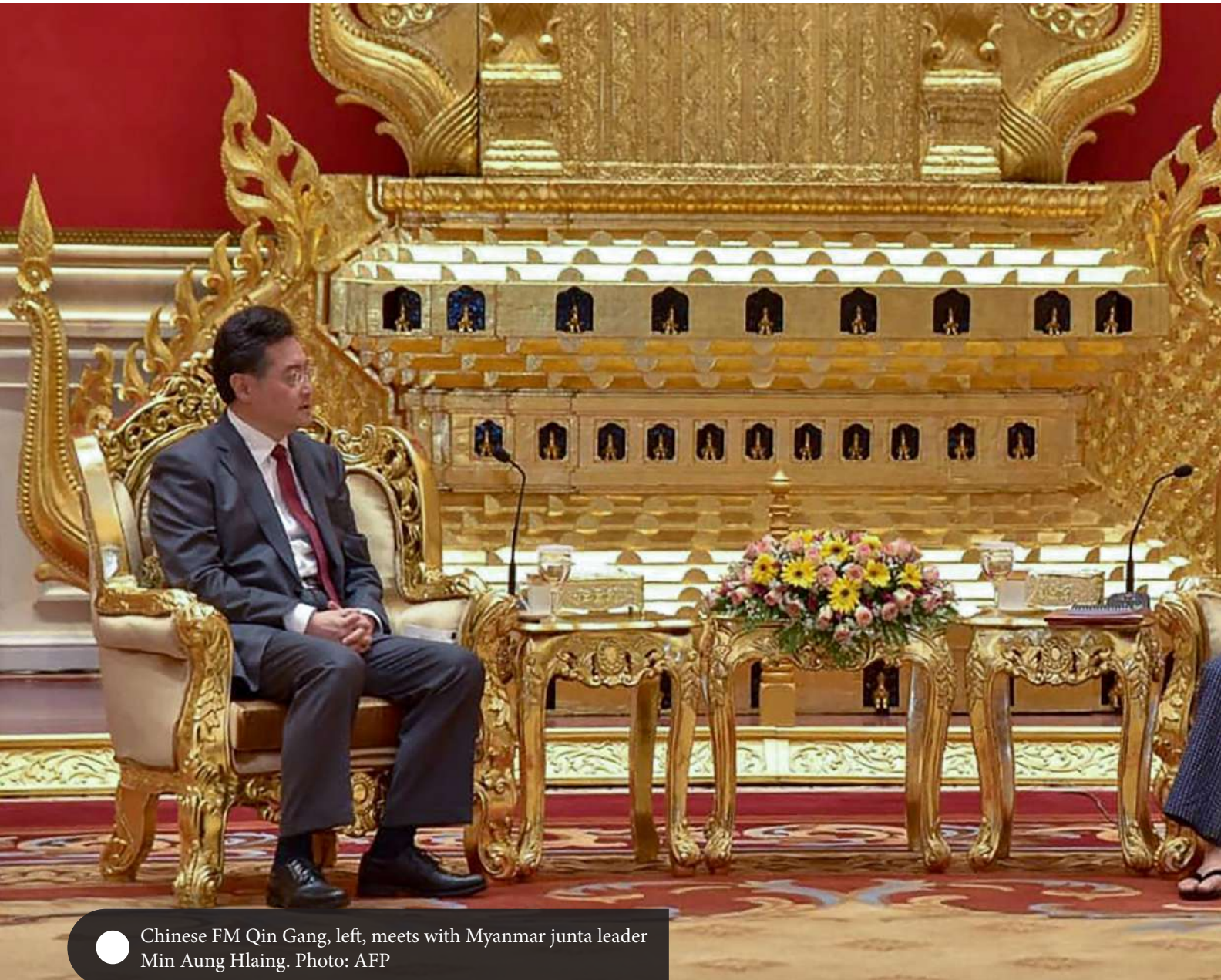
China is a major ally and arms supplier of the internationally isolated junta and has refused to condemn the military takeover.

China "stands with Myanmar on the international stage", Foreign Minister Qin Gang told junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, according to a Burmese-language statement from the junta's infor-

mation team.

"China advocates that the international community should respect Myanmar's sovereignty and play a constructive role in helping it achieving peace and reconciliation," Qin said, according to a later statement from the Chinese foreign ministry.

Qin will remain in the country until Thursday, according



Chinese FM Qin Gang, left, meets with Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing. Photo: AFP

to the junta.

His predecessor, Wang Yi, visited Myanmar in July last year, meeting with his counterpart but not the junta chief.

Myanmar state media footage showed Qin being received by Min Aung Hlaing in a meeting hall decked with gold curtains and red wallpaper.

The two discussed “diplomatic relations, friendly cooperation, the recent situation in Myanmar, border trade, investments and cooperation on energy and

electricity”, the junta statement said.

Qin said Beijing will continue to support Myanmar’s “development, accelerate key cooperation projects in the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, and carry out projects on agriculture, education and health care,” according to the Chinese foreign ministry.

Qin also met Myanmar’s military-appointed foreign minister and its minister for international cooperation, both statements noted.

Several Beijing-backed infrastructure projects are slated to run through northern Myanmar and link China’s landlocked Yunnan province with the Indian Ocean.

BORDER VISIT

Beijing also backs and arms several ethnic rebel groups along its border with Myanmar, analysts say.

Some of these groups have clashed repeatedly with the Myanmar military in the aftermath of the coup, and an alliance of China-backed rebels in March called for Beijing’s help to defuse the crisis.

On Tuesday, Qin visited the China-Myanmar border, calling for “friendship and cooperation” between the two countries.

China has maintained ties with the junta that has been shunned by many western countries over its bloody crackdown on opposition to its rule.

Last year, Beijing said it

would help safeguard Myanmar’s sovereignty “no matter how the situation changes”.

China appointed a special envoy to Myanmar, Deng Xijun, in December, who has met the junta leader at least twice since then, as well as ethnic rebel leaders.

Beijing’s diplomats are also mediating between Myanmar and Bangladesh for a pilot programme to repatriate Rohingya refugees who fled a 2017 military crackdown now subject to a UN genocide investigation.

In the meeting, Qin reiterated that China backs Myanmar boosting ties with Bangladesh and said Beijing is willing to work with the two countries to expand trilateral cooperation.

After his Myanmar visit, Qin will travel to India for a meeting of foreign ministers from the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Chinese foreign ministry said without providing details on his itinerary.

AFP.



CHINESE FM MEETS UN ENVOY OVER MYANMAR CRISIS



Chinese FM Qin Gang, right, meets with UN Special Envoy Ms Noeleen Heyzer. Photo: Chinese Foreign Ministry

Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang met with UN special envoy Ms Noeleen Heyzer to discuss the crisis in Myanmar, Chinese media report.

International society should respect Myanmar's sovereignty and promote political dialogue to restore peace and stability in Myanmar, Qin Gang said on Monday at the meeting, noting that the Myanmar issue is complex and has no quick fix.

He called on the international community to respect Myanmar's sovereignty, and support all parties in Myanmar, within the constitutional and legal framework, to bridge differences and resume the political transition process through political dialogue, Chinese media reports.

Qin said the international community should respect the mediation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and promote the implementation of its five-point consensus on Myanmar.

Ms Heyzer said that the effort to resolve the Myanmar issue should be led by Myanmar, and that the will of its people should be respected.

The UN appreciates China's important role in promoting the settlement of the Myanmar issue and hopes that China will continue to make contributions to Myanmar's peace, stability and development, said the UN special envoy.

BURMESE WOMEN'S UNION SAYS AN INCREASED NUMBER OF WOMEN WERE ARRESTED IN APRIL



In April 2023, the numbers of women arrested and detained in Myanmar has increased. Meanwhile the number of women who were convicted and killed has also increased rapidly, according to the Burmese Women's Union in their latest report.

Since the day of the military coup until April 28, 2023, there are total of 3,390 women who were arbitrarily arrested and detained by the junta forces. Out of those, 819 were sentenced and are being unjustly punished.

On April 7, a judge charged four under aged girls, who were only around 15 and 16 years old. The judge sentenced to the young girls to almost five years in prison under the Section of 50-J and 52-A, with the accusation of them being members of the People's Defense Forces in Patheingyi district.

Most of those arrested in April 2023 were arrested due to writing and sharing posts against the Myanmar junta and their connections on social media, and there are also many cases that cannot be confirmed in terms of the reasons for their arrests.

Between April 1 and 28, a total of 43 women were detained by the junta. Those women were from Irrawaddy Division, Karen State, Magway Division, Mon State, Mandalay Division, Yangon Division, Sagaing Division, Bago Division, Shan State and Kachin State.

Bago Region has the highest number of women arrested with 9 women and Yangon Region has the second highest number with 8 women.

In addition, a total of 513 women lost their lives during the attempted coup by the terrorist army.

From April 1st to 28th, 2023, 55 women lost their lives due to the terrorist army's airstrike and shelling targeting the civilian and firing with heavy weapons into villages.

In Sagaing Division, Kantbalu Township, Pazi Gyi village, as many as (45) women lost their lives due to the airstrike shelling by the terrorist army on April 11. Among those who lost their lives, children who were only (6) months old to elderly people over 60 years old were killed.

This report is compiled by the Burmese Women's Union mainly based on the information provided by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) and as well as information published by reliable media agencies. Due to the challenges of restriction on the information flows and communication cut off, the number on the ground could be much higher than the number which shown in this report.

ROHINGYA TEAM SAYS WILL NOT AGREE TO REFUGEE RETURN AFTER MYANMAR VISIT

Rohingya refugees who visited Myanmar on Friday told AFP they would not voluntarily agree to return there, after touring facilities meant to accommodate the repatriation of the stateless minority to their homeland.

Bangladesh is home to

about a million Rohingya, most of whom fled a 2017 military crackdown in neighbouring Myanmar that is now subject to a UN genocide investigation.

Both countries signed a repatriation agreement to return them later that year, but little progress has been made since, and

the United Nations has repeatedly warned conditions were not right for their return.

Several Bangladeshi officials accompanied 20 Rohingya refugees during Friday's visit to two model village resettlement camps erected for the pilot return project.



The Rohingya team return to Bangladesh after their visit to Rakhine State. Photo: AFP

"We have seen the camps... But they don't accept our citizenship demands," Mohammad Salim, a Rohingya member of the delegation, told AFP.

"We will not go to the camps," he added. "We must return to our own land. We didn't like it there. We won't go. We will return if our safe repatriation and demands are accepted."

A woman member of the delegation said she was worried about her safety in the newly built

facilities, which include a market, hospital and reception centre for returning refugees.

"Nothing is safe for us there. They can subjugate and torture us again," she told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Bangladesh refugee commissioner Mizanur Rahman, who accompanied the delegation, nonetheless said that his country wanted the repatriation scheme to go ahead.

"We went to Myanmar today. There are many Rohingya moving freely and doing business there," he told AFP.

"The repatriation must begin. Myanmar representatives will also come to Bangladesh. And subject to discussion, we will decide on the next step."

Officials have told AFP they expect repatriations to begin later this month, before the annual monsoon season.

Rohingya refugees, who have spent nearly six years living in overcrowded and squalid camps in Bangladesh, have been consistently sceptical of the scheme since it became public knowledge in March.

They say that none of their queries about security or recognition of their right to citizenship in Myanmar has been answered.

The Rohingya are widely viewed in Myanmar as interlopers from Bangladesh, despite roots in the country stretching back centuries.

'MUST BE VOLUNTARY'

The UN refugee agency

said it was aware of the trip, which was taking place "under a bilateral arrangement between Bangladesh and Myanmar".

"UNHCR is not involved in arranging this visit. However, we reiterate that every refugee has an inalienable right to return to their home country," agency spokesperson Regina De La Portilla told AFP.

"Refugee returns must be voluntary, in safety and dignity," she added. "No refugee should be forced to do so."

Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, who has dismissed the Rohingya identity as "imaginary", was head of the armed forces during the 2017 crackdown.

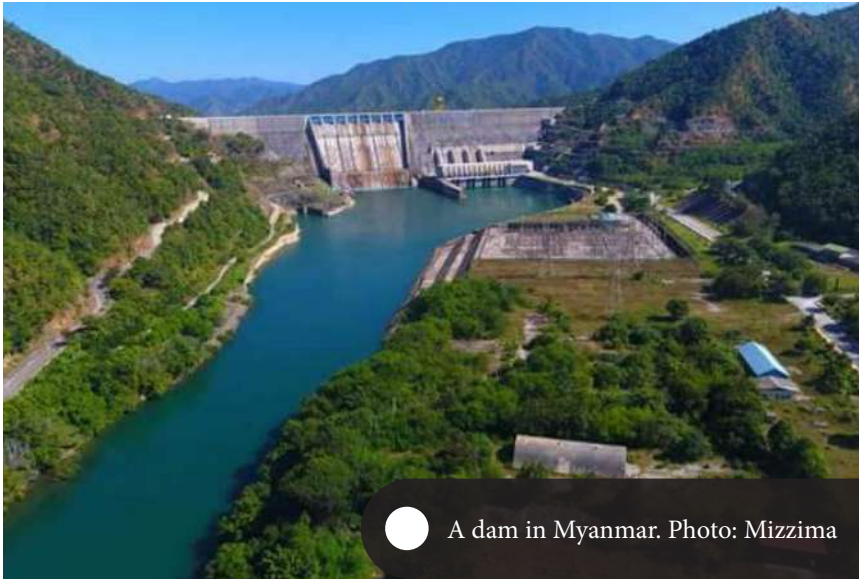
The International Court of Justice is probing allegations of rape, murder and arson against entire Rohingya villages by Myanmar's security forces during that year's violence.

The repatriation plan agreed to in 2017 failed to make any significant headway in the years since, partly over concerns the Rohingya would not be safe if they returned.

AFP



SHAN CSOS PROTEST CONSTRUCTION OF DAMS IN SHAN STATE



A dam in Myanmar. Photo: Mizzima

A total of 13 civil society organisations sent an open letter on 25 April to Shan State ethnic armed resistance groups and political parties protesting the planned construction of the Upper Yeywa and Namtu hydropower projects.

The dams are being built on the Dokhtawaddy river in Kyaukme and Hsipaw townships in northern Shan State.

Local communities who will be impacted by the dams have opposed the projects from the outset, but have been ignored by previous governments as well as by the current military regime.

According to the open letter, the dam projects will impact tens of thousands of local residents and flood 11 village tracts in Hsipaw Township, including Bawgyo Tract, the site of the historic Bawgyo pagoda, and Lilu Village in Namsang Township.

Nang Mo Seng, a member of the Namtu River Protectors said: "The 11 village tracts contain

over 100 villages and tens of thousands of local residents. The majority of them are ethnic Shans, but there are also other ethnic groups living there."

The Upper Yeywa hydropower project was begun in 2008 and is projected to start producing electricity in March 2025, while the Namtu hydropower project was scheduled to become operational in April 2022, but is still currently under construction.

Ten dams are already operational in Shan State and they currently produce more than half of Myanmar's hydropower. Despite this, much of the population in Shan State still has no electricity.

According to the open letter none of the electricity produced by the Upper Yeywa or Namtu hydropower projects will go to Shan State.

The letter also said that the dam projects lack transparency. No social or environmental impact assessments have been

carried out for either project and opinions about the dams by local communities have been distorted.

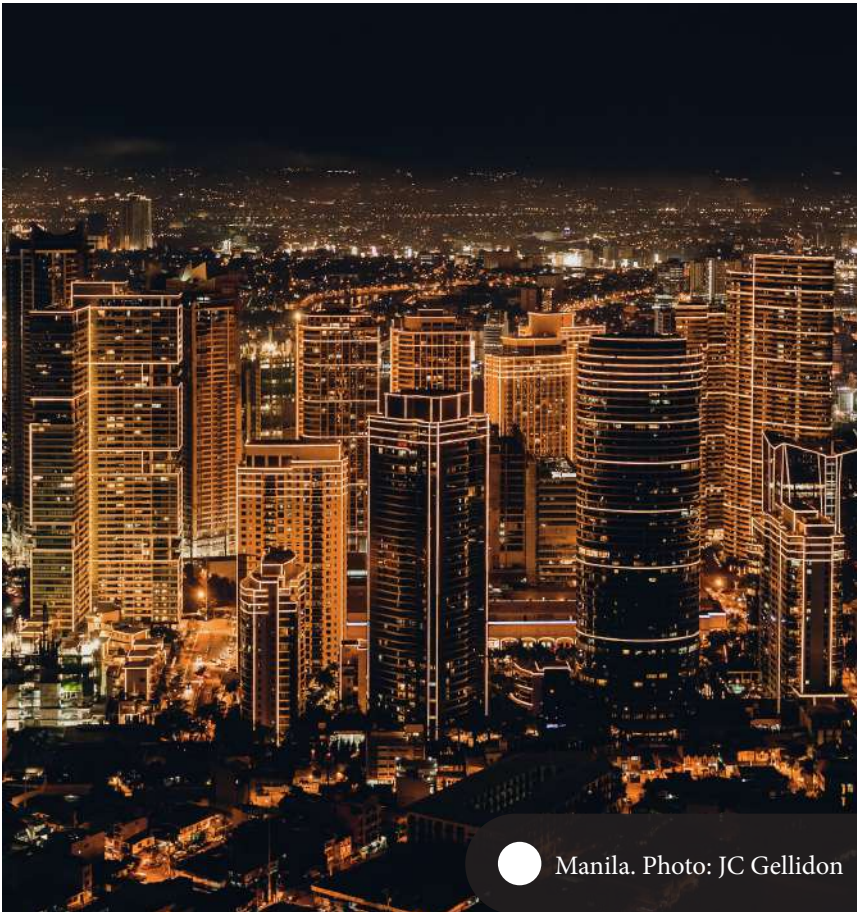
Nang Mo Seng said: "The military regime has failed to disclose who will benefit from the dam projects, and where the power generated will be used. Shan State already has ten major dams. Despite the existence of numerous dams, the inhabitants of Shan do not have complete access to power. That is why we are doubtful that it will be used for the locals."

The letter said that because of these factors, there is an urgent need for ethnic armed resistance groups and political parties to stand together with local communities to protect Shan State's rivers.

As of the time of reporting none of the ethnic armed organisations who were sent the letter have responded to it.

Amongst the CSOs who signed the letter were: the Global Shan Network, the Tai Youth Yangon, the Tai Youth Community South Korea, the Tai Youth Network Japan, the Tai Youth Htong Mao, the Tai Students' Union, the Namtu River Protectors, the Progressive Youth Network Hsipaw, the Kyun Ta Htaung Myae Foundation and the Shan Youth Wing Maw.

PHILIPPINES RESCUES OVER 1,000 TRAFFICKING VICTIMS



Manila. Photo: JC Gellidon

Philippine authorities have rescued over a thousand people from several Asian nations who were trafficked into the country, held captive and forced to run online scams, an official said Saturday.

International alarm has grown in recent months over internet scams in the region often staffed by trafficking victims tricked or coerced into promoting bogus crypto investments.

Michelle Sabino, a spokeswoman for the Philippine national police force's anti-cyber-crime group, said officers raided a cluster of buildings Thursday in Mabalacat city about 90 kilometres north of Manila.

A total of 1,090 people were rescued who had been re-

cruited to run online scams.

Sabino said the victims were forced to target unsuspecting people in the United States, Europe and Canada.

Their passports were confiscated and they were made to work up to 18 hours a day, with salary deductions for interacting with colleagues or taking extended breaks.

"You're like a prisoner without a cell. You're not even allowed to talk to your roommates," Sabino told AFP.

"They're not allowed to leave outside the bounds of the gate. After 18 hours of work, they're brought to their dormitory."

The victims were mostly Chinese nationals, Vietnamese, Filipinos and Indonesians, police

said in a separate statement.

Authorities also rescued people from Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan, Myanmar, Hong Kong and Nepal.

Sabino said the workers were trained to entice strangers into buying cryptocurrency or depositing money into bogus bank accounts after establishing fake romantic relationships.

"They will build up a promise of a good future together. Let's buy a house, buy a car, let's invest money or let's do business together," she said.

At least 12 suspected ring-leaders of the scheme have been arrested and are set to be charged with human trafficking. They include seven Chinese nationals, four Indonesians and a Malaysian, Sabino said.

Sabino also said the police operation was the result of a plea by the Indonesian ambassador in Manila for help locating distressed nationals.

Last month, Philippine senator Risa Hontiveros warned that "scam call centres" were operating in the Philippines and employing foreigners trafficked into the country.

AFP

COVID NO LONGER A GLOBAL HEALTH EMERGENCY: WHO

The Covid-19 pandemic, which killed millions of people and wreaked economic and social havoc, no longer constitutes a global health emergency, the WHO said Friday, warning that the threat remained.

It is “with great hope that I declare Covid-19 over as a global health emergency”, World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told reporters.

The move came after the WHO’s independent emergency committee on the Covid crisis agreed it no longer merited the organisation’s highest alert level and “advised that it is time to transition to long-term management of the COVID-19 pandemic”.

But the danger was not over, according to Tedros, who estimated Covid had killed “at least 20 million” people -- about three times the nearly seven million deaths officially recorded.

“This virus is here to stay. It is still killing, and it’s still changing,” he said.

“The worst thing any country could do now is

to use this news as a reason to let down its guard, to dismantle the systems it has built, or to send the message to its people that Covid-19 is nothing to worry about.”

NEVER AGAIN

The UN health agency first declared the so-called public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) over the crisis on January 30, 2020.

That was weeks after the mysterious new viral disease was first detected in China and when fewer than 100 cases and no deaths had been reported outside that country.

But it was only after Tedros described the worsening Covid situation as a pandemic on March 11, 2020, that many countries woke up to the danger.

By then, the SARS CoV-2 virus which causes the disease had already begun its deadly rampage around the globe.

“One of the greatest tragedies of Covid-19 is that it didn’t have to be this way,” Tedros said, decrying that “a lack of coordination, a lack of equity and a



lack of solidarity” meant “lives were lost that should not have been”.

“We must promise ourselves and our children and grandchildren that we will never make those mistakes again.”

Even though Covid deaths globally have plunged 95 percent since January, the disease remains a major killer.

Last week alone “Covid-19 claimed a life every three minutes”, Tedros said, “and that’s just the deaths we know about.”

“The emergency phase is over, but Covid is not,” agreed Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO’s technical lead on Covid-19.

ORIGINS A MYSTERY

Tedros has warned of the ongoing impact of Long Covid, which provokes numerous and often severe and debilitating symptoms that can drag for years.

This condition has been estimated to impact one in 10 people who contract Covid, suggesting that hundreds of millions could need longer-term care, he cautioned.

The world is currently striving to put in place

measures to help avert future global health catastrophes.


But those efforts are being hampered by heated debate around the origins of the pandemic.

The virus was first detected in late 2019 in Wuhan China, but it remains unclear how and where it first began spreading among humans.

The issue, which has been heavily politicised, has proved divisive for the scientific community, which is split between a theory that the virus jumped naturally to humans from animals and one maintaining that the virus likely leaked from a Wuhan laboratory -- a claim China angrily denies.

WHO and its member states have meanwhile launched discussions about an international treaty or something similar to draw lessons from the mistakes made and ensure the world reacts more effectively and equitably to the next one.

AFP.



Stephane Bancel, CEO and director of Moderna, Inc., (centre) testifies before the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee on the price of Covid vaccines, on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, on March 22, 2023. Covid vaccine makers have been coming under scrutiny over the cost and the safety of their products. Photo: AFP

HONG KONG POLICE SEIZE DISMANTLED TIANANMEN PROTEST STATUE



Hong Kong police question a woman in a park. Photo: AFP

Hong Kong national security police seized an “exhibit” on Friday that has been identified by local media as a dismantled statue commemorating the deadly Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989.

The eight-metre-high (26-feet) “Pillar of Shame” by Danish artist Jens Galschiot - featuring anguished faces in a twisted tower - sat on the University of Hong Kong’s (HKU) campus for more than two decades.

It was dismantled in 2021 amid widespread outcry and the pieces have since been stored in a cargo container on an HKU property in Hong Kong’s rural Yuen Long district.

Police said in a statement the National Security Department conducted searches with a warrant on Friday and seized “an exhibit related to an ‘incitement to subversion’ case” in Yuen Long.

“Subversion” is one category of offences introduced in Hong Kong in 2020 under a Bei-

jing-imposed national security law. It can carry a maximum sentence of life in prison.

The University of Hong Kong confirmed that police presented a search warrant and “removed a piece of evidence” from its Yuen Long site on Friday morning.

The seizure comes just a month before June 4, which will be the 34th anniversary of the bloody crackdown by Chinese troops on peaceful pro-democracy protesters around Tiananmen Square in Beijing.

An annual vigil commemorating the event in Victoria Park drew thousands every year and was a vivid illustration of Hong Kong’s political freedoms.

It was banned by police from 2020 following massive, and at times violent, pro-democracy protests.

The three leaders of the Hong Kong Alliance, which organised the vigil, are awaiting trial for

inciting subversion of state power.

Galschiot told AFP he was surprised by the confiscation and was not notified by either the university or police.

“They can’t use this sculpture as a kind of evidence against the democracy movement, because I’m the owner and it was my initiative to put it up in Hong Kong,” he told AFP.

The artist said he was considering legal action to assert his ownership of “Pillar of Shame”.

Galschiot said last year he had tried to move the statue out of Hong Kong but none of the logistics companies he approached agreed to help him because of fear of reprisal.

Following the statue’s removal from HKU in 2021, five other Hong Kong universities removed Tiananmen monuments that had stood on their campuses for years.

AFP

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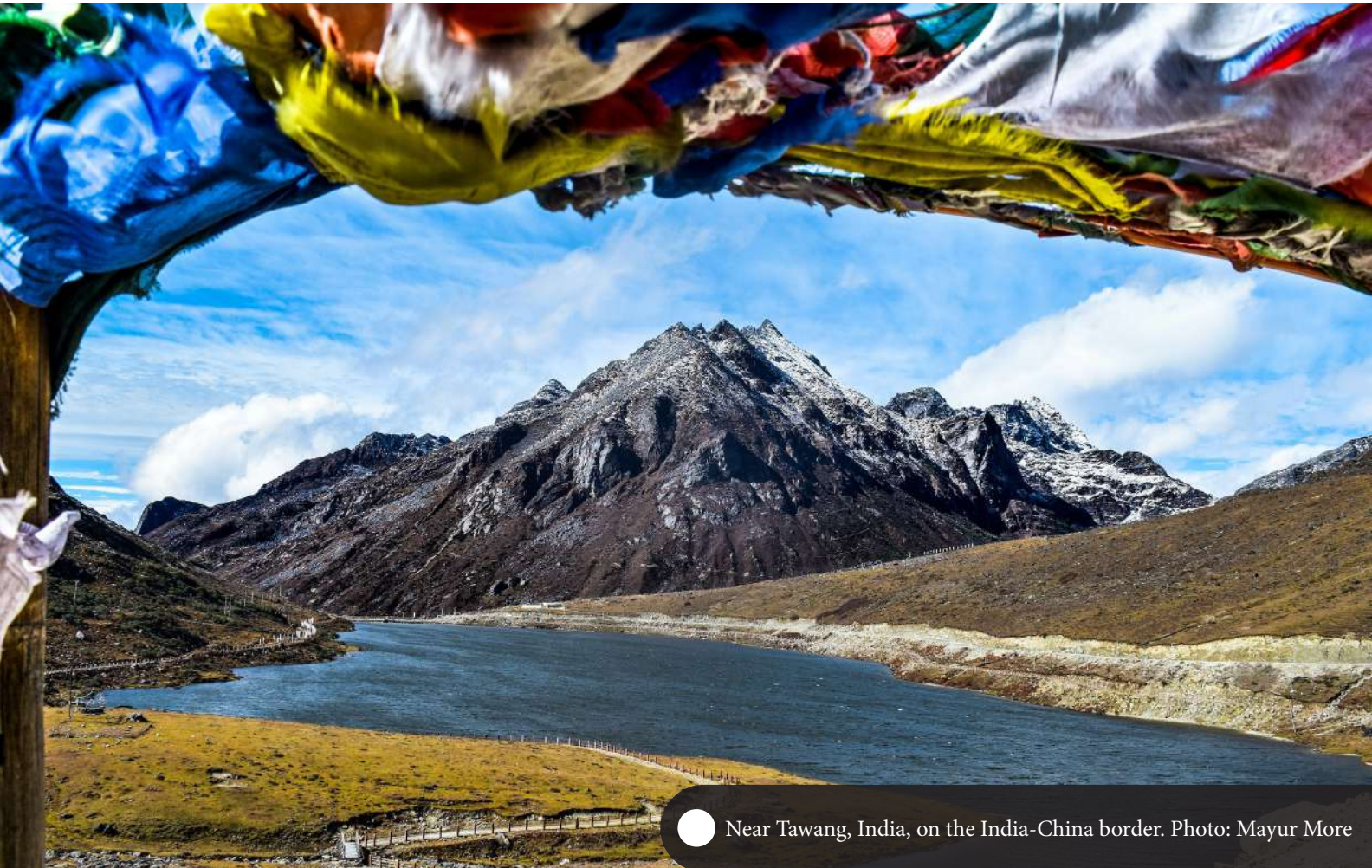


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TAKING THE HIGH ROAD: INDIA INFRASTRUCTURE DRIVE COUNTERS CHINA



Near Tawang, India, on the India-China border. Photo: Mayur More

Freshly laid roads, bridges, upgraded military camps, and new civilian infrastructure dot the winding high Himalayan route to the Indian frontier village of Zemithang - which China renamed last month to press its claim to the area.

It is in the far northeastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, almost all of which Beijing insists falls under its sovereignty as “South Tibet”.

The Asian giants fought a war in 1962 over their 3,500-kilometre (2,200-mile) divide, now known as the Line of Actual Control, and it remains disputed to this day, with sporadic clashes and regular diplomatic manoeuvres.

Culturally largely Tibetan, Arunachal Pradesh is savage territory for battle, with mountain passes as high as 4,750 metres (15,000 feet) still covered in snowdrifts as late as May, and thickly forested slopes

lower down.

Now both powers are engaged in major construction drives to reinforce their positions.

New Delhi bristled at Beijing’s announcement renaming Zemithang - dubbed “Bangqin” - and 10 other sites in April.

Foreign ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi said the state “is, has been, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India”, adding: “Attempts to assign invented names will not alter this reality.” Beijing has sought to change the facts by force before.

Zemithang, just a few kilometres from the boundary, and picture-postcard Tawang, the main town in the district -- home to the biggest and oldest Tibetan Buddhist monastery outside Lhasa -- were both seized by Chinese forces in 1962 as they inflicted a humiliating defeat on Indian troops before retreating.

The Indian army officer charged with preventing a repetition is Brigadier N.M. Bendigeri, who commands thousands of troops in Tawang.

Hundreds of his men clashed with Chinese forces in December.

And three years ago in Ladakh, at the western end of the frontier, 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers were killed in brutal hand-to-hand combat.

Beijing's announcements "won't change a thing here", Bendigeri said.

But in fact, Chinese actions are profoundly changing the once neglected and remote region.

BALANCING ACT

Worried about China's build-up on the other side, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has pumped billions of dollars into ambitious connectivity projects, to boost civilian presence, and establish new paramilitary battalions.

India has scaled up its defences, deploying cruise missiles, howitzers, US-made Chinook transport helicopters and drones.

At the same time, in an indication of New Delhi's constant geopolitical balancing act, India is part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which includes China and Russia.

As the grouping's current chair, on Friday it hosted a meeting of its foreign ministers in Goa.

But in the face of China's increased assertiveness under leader Xi Jinping it has also become a member of the so-called Quad with the US, Australia and Japan, set up to counter Beijing.

Within days of Beijing's renaming announcement, India's powerful interior minister Amit Shah launched a \$585 million "vibrant villages" scheme for civilians along the border.

"India wants peace with everyone," said Shah at Kibithoo, one of the first Arunachal Pradesh villages overrun in 1962.

"But no one will be able to encroach on even an inch of our country's land".

'DUAL-USE GHOST VILLAGES'

New Delhi has expressed alarm over its neighbour's push to develop "xiaokang" -- meaning well-to-do villages in Mandarin -- along the Line of Actual Control.

Bendigeri fears they will be "dual-use ghost villages", intended to alter realities on the ground.

He also worries the People's Liberation Army could use them during a conflict, echoing the way Beijing has built militarised artificial islands in the disputed South China Sea.

But India's capacity to respond is constrained by the fact its military budget is, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, little more than a quarter of China's.

And New Delhi can only persuade civilians to stay in the areas, rather than compel them.

Modi's government said last year it had sanctioned 35 infrastructure schemes and 2,319 kilometres of roads in the state.

Souvenir vendor Tenzin Dorje, 35, says more tourists are coming to his shop in Tawang, but it is still 12 hours from the nearest airport.

"If the roads improve, everything improves for us and the people who want to come here," he said.

The showpiece project is a tunnel under the Sela pass which Colonel Ravikant Tiwari of the Border Roads Organisation said will be the world's longest tunnel at an altitude of 4,000 metres.

It will provide "all-weather connectivity" and "boost strategic defence infrastructure" where snowstorms regularly cut the existing road every winter, he said, as an army of workers laboured in freezing conditions.

'WE ARE BUDDHISTS'

Zemithang is where the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama entered India when he fled into exile in 1959.

The location of his crossing has become a pilgrimage site for his followers, who pass India's last army post and cross a rickety old bridge over a raging river to pray at a "holy tree" he reportedly planted at the time.

A large Chinese military camp is visible on a slope about a kilometre ahead.

Residents used to have "close ties with people from Tibet but things changed after 1962", said local Sangey Tsetan, 61.

"We remember. We are not the same. We are Buddhists and they're Communists."

AFP

UN EXPERT URGES JAPAN TO ‘STEP UP PRESSURE’ ON MYANMAR JUNTA



Tom Andrews, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights.
Photo: AFP

Japan must assume a greater leadership role to address the deteriorating crisis in Myanmar and “step up pressure on the country’s military junta”, a UN-appointed independent rights expert urged on Friday.

“The international community’s response to the crisis in Myanmar is failing, and that failure has contributed to a lethal downward spiral that is devastating the lives of millions of people,” Tom Andrews, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, said at the end of a 10-day official visit to Japan.

Referring to the worsening situation in the country, he said Senior General Min Aung Hlaing,

who has led the junta since the February 2021 coup, had responded to widespread opposition to their rule with “barbarism and oppression” against the people of Myanmar.

‘HALLMARKS OF THE JUNTA’

“Arbitrary detention, torture and systematic attacks on villages have become hallmarks of the junta,” he said. “The military is repeatedly attacking civilian populations throughout the country and has quite literally made war on the Myanmar people.”

Japan’s leadership will be “vital” in recalibrating a failing international response to the crisis, he said, calling on Tokyo to work with regional and global allies to weaken the capacity of Myanmar’s military

junta to attack its citizens.

'THIS IS AN EMERGENCY'

The Special Rapporteur also raised alarms about an impending humanitarian disaster in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. Without immediate additional funding, a decision to cut food rations by an additional 20 per cent will be made in the coming weeks, reducing daily food rations to 27 cents per person. The cuts would also potentially eliminate food rations completely for hundreds of thousands.

"This is an emergency," he warned, adding that he had visited Japan based on his belief Tokyo has an "essential" role to play in resolving the crisis. "Further cuts will leave the Rohingya, already victims of genocidal attacks in Myanmar, at risk of starvation and drive thousands into boats and dangerous land routes in utter desperation."

IMPOSE SANCTIONS

As such, he called on the Government of Japan and all Member States to immediately increase humanitarian contributions, including by redirecting funds from development programmes in Myanmar. He also urged Japan to impose targeted economic sanctions on the Myanmar military and its key sources of funding, just as it is doing in response to the crisis in Ukraine.

"Economic sanctions that deprive the junta of the resources required to operate its war-making machinery would weaken the capacity of the junta to attack its people," the Special Rapporteur said.

RENOUNCE 'FRAUDULENT' ELECTIONS

In addition, he urged Japan to terminate a Ministry of Defence training programme for military personnel from Myanmar, referencing credible reports linking previous trainees to military units that have committed atrocities against civilians.

He also called on the Government of Japan to clearly and consistently renounce the junta's plan to stage fraudulent national elections as a means of legitimizing itself.

"It is not possible to hold a genuine election when opposition leaders are arrested, detained, tortured and executed, when key political parties have

been dissolved, when it is illegal to criticize the junta, and when journalists are imprisoned for doing their job," he said.

The upcoming Group of Seven (G7) Summit of leading economies in Hiroshima presents an opportunity for Japan to shine a light on the situation in Myanmar before the world, he said, urging the Prime Minister to ensure that the crisis is high on the agenda and that a strong, unified message and action emerges.

Courtesy of UN News



Photo: Zink Hein

KARENNI STATE

Mental healthcare course held for Karenni State IDPs

The Kyay Lat Myay civil society organisation (CSO) held a mental healthcare training course for 20 internally displaced people (IDPs) living in IDP camps in the northern part of Demoso Township in Karenni state, on 25 April.

A one-day training program for the male and female trainees was held on 25 April.

The course taught the IDP volunteers how to effectively treat trauma and activities to relieve trauma.

Children also took part in the event. There were sports events, singing and dancing and drawing activities for children who attended the event. They were also given a nutritious meal.

"We organized the awareness program for adults, and the children received remedial therapy", said Ma Mu Sell, the Director of the Kyay Lat Myay CSO.

Because of the war IDPs are showing signs of trauma, according to the Kyay Lat Myay CSO.

U Zaw Min Htike, the chairman of Kyay Lat Myay, said: "People are going through a lot of trauma because of the conflict, the sounds of heavy weapons and bombs, and [the stress of] having to budget for food and necessities. The children are also unhappy, parents can't afford to buy them snacks. When the country was at peace children used to play in groups, but now we have discovered that children are feeling small and lonely."

Previously, in 2021, The Kyay Lat Myay CSO organised mental healthcare training courses in some Magway Township villages. They also held the courses in villages and IDP camps in Karenni State in 2022

and 2023.

Previously there were over 300,000 people living in Karenni State, but around two-thirds of the population have had to flee their homes to avoid violence and military airstrikes.

KAREN STATE

KNU elects Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win as chairman

The 17th Karen National Union (KNU) Congress elected Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win as the 10th KNU Chairman on 2 May.

He took over from 91-year-old Saw Mutu Pho who retired.

The 17th KNU Congress started on 24 April in the KNU Administrative area. It is normally held every four years and the 17th Congress was originally due to have been held in 2022, but had been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the coup.

"In the election, Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win won with 70 votes over Saw Sel Gay from KNU Brigade (3) with 68 votes", said an attendee to Mizzima.

Padoh Saw Kwe has a degree in economics from Yangon University and was KNU Brigade 4 chairman from 1990 to 2012.

On 3 May the Congress also elected the KNU General Secretary Joint Secretaries (1) and (2) and 45 Central Committee members.

KNU Brigades 2 and 5 did not attend the Congress or vote in the elections. There are seven KNU brigades and enough attended the Congress to make the votes binding.



NAY PYI TAW JUNTA POLICE OUTPOST ATTACKED

Defence forces attacked a police outpost in Nay Pyi Taw on the evening at about 7:40 p.m. on 3 May.

The outpost was near to the Children's Orthopedic Hospital between Ottarathiri and Pubbathiri townships.

Two junta soldiers were killed, two more were injured and a defence force fighter received a leg injury, according to Captain Trigon, a communications officer for the Sittaung Urban Guerilla Force, one of the defence forces involved in the attack.

He said: "One of our members was injured in the leg, and he is now receiving medical treatment. His situation has improved."

The resistance forces launched their attack by firing a grenade at the outpost before following up with 9mm pistol fire. The junta forces then launched a counterattack.

"We want to warn police and junta soldiers not to endanger people. We can attack them any time as they are close by", said Captain Trigon.

The attack was carried out by a combined force from Sittaung Urban Guerilla Force (Nay Pyi Taw) and Dekkhinathiri Township People's Defence Force (PDF).

Despite a tightening of security in Nay Pyi Taw there has been a rise in the number of attacks on the junta by defence forces there.

INDIA-OWNED PORT IN SITTWE WILL OPEN ON 9 MAY



On the streets of Sittwe.
Photo: AFP

The Indian consulate in Sittwe confirmed that the Sittwe port which was a part of Indo-Myanmar friendship projects would be opened on 9 May.

A vessel will leave Syama Prasad Mooker port in Kolkata, India on 4 May with India officials and other special guests will arrive in Sittwe by air on 9 May.

After opening this Sittwe port of the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport (KMTT) project, vessels with tonnage of 5,000-6,000 tons will sail between the Sittwe and Kolkata ports.

This Kaladan project will facilitate direct trade between Kolkata in India and Sittwe port in Myanmar and then the goods can be transported to Paletwa town in Chin State, Myanmar by inland water vessels on the Kaladan River.

The governments of India and Myanmar

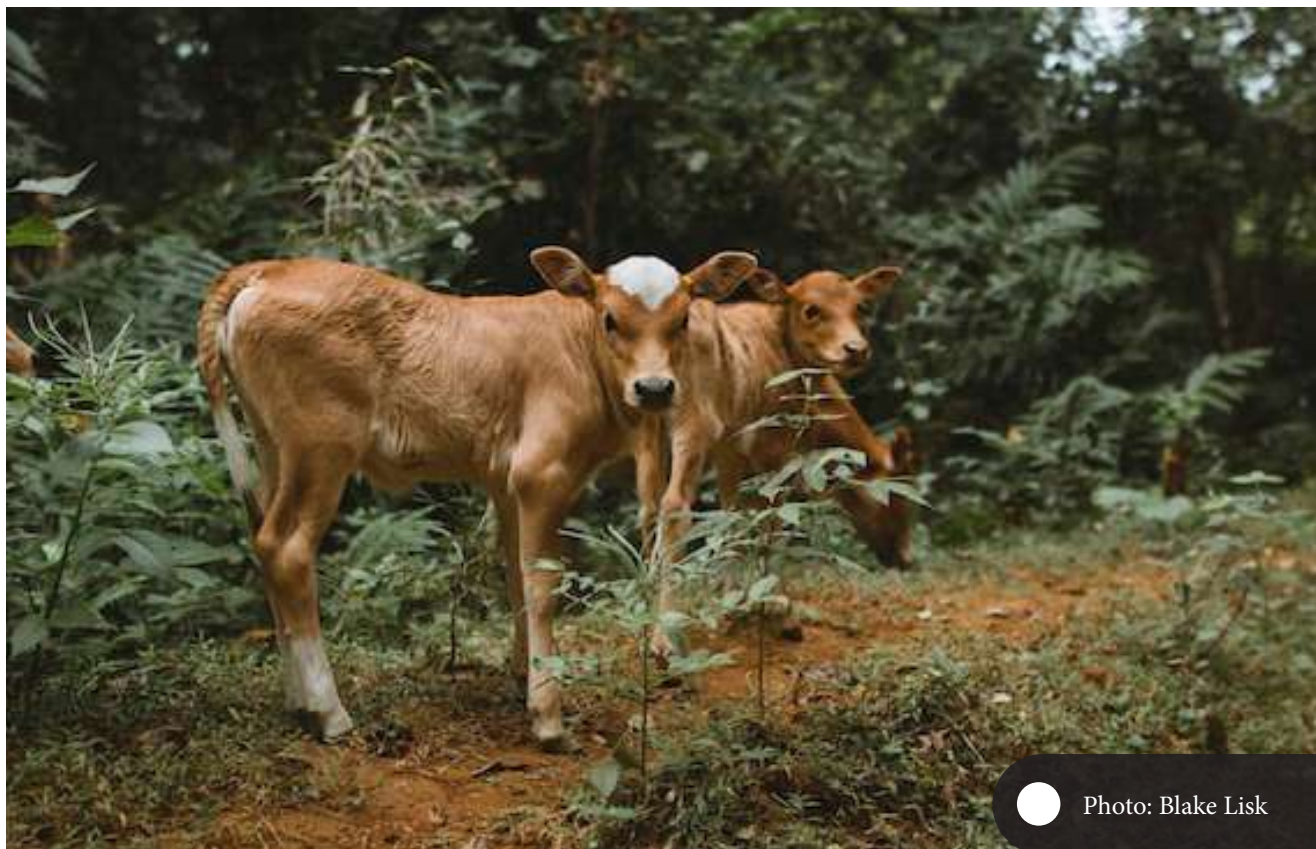
signed a MoU for this KMTT project in 2008 and the construction of Sittwe port in this project was started in 2009.

The first vessel will carry 3,000 tons of cement from Kolkata port to Sittwe port in the inauguration of this new Sittwe port.

The Indian government spent US\$120 million for this port project and they will have the 30-year right to operate this port.

The Myanmar government said that Myanmar would own this port officially only after 30 years' use by the India government.

MANY AYEYARWADY LIVESTOCK FARMERS HAVE QUIT THE BUSINESS DUE TO HIGH COSTS



As many as 85% of livestock farmers in the Ayeyarwady Region have ceased their business.

The farmers said that they had many difficulties to continue their businesses after the prices of animal feeds and medicines rose up two-fold.

Similarly, small-scale livestock farmers in the Yangon Region are preparing to cease their business operations as they suffered losses from their businesses.

Over the two years after the coup the prices of livestock farming inputs such as animal feeds and medicines rose sharply, as did the rising cost of construction of livestock farms, soaring general expenses and labour costs, creating a crisis for these farmers.

Moreover, a poultry farmer said that the livestock they produced from their farms such as poultry, pork and fish could not compete in prices with the products of big companies and imported frozen meat

in the market, the result being huge losses for these livestock farmers.

In these livestock farms in Myanmar many chickens and pigs died of infectious diseases at the end of 2022 and then they encountered sickness of their animals this year as well, compounding the losses.

A livestock farmer said that the small-scale livestock farmers had to cease their businesses and only a handful of the wealthy farmers with a strong financial background could keep afloat in the livestock farming business.

Moreover, the livestock farmers could run their businesses with government loans and their own capital in the past but now they could not get loans from the government. The livestock farmers said that depreciation of the Myanmar Kyat and unavailability of government loans pushed them to consider stopping their businesses.

MOST BUSINESSES IN MYANMAR 'NO LONGER USE BANKS'



People queue for the ATM in Yangon. Photo; AFP

The Economic Monitor Report of Myanmar issued by the World Bank in April says that about two thirds of businesses in Myanmar were no longer using the banking system according to an assessment of 2022.

The businesses in Myanmar distrust the banking system and they mainly use banking for money transfer purposes only, the report says.

About 91% of Myanmar businesses conduct their businesses in cash transactions only. Moreover 97% of Myanmar businesses which use the banking system use it only for money transfer purposes, the World Bank report says.

The World Bank conducted this survey in dividing the country into five zones: Yangon, Mandalay, Chin State, middle dry zone, Ayeyarwady delta and

coastal area, and highlands, with 500 businesses assessed in Myanmar.

The World Bank explained that the 500 businesses surveyed in this report were involved in four sectors namely agriculture, manufacturing, retail and services.

The US dollar exchange rate had soared since the end of August 2022 up to 4,550 Kyat against the dollar. And the current exchange rate is 2,800 kyat against the dollar in May 2023.

The Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) issued a notice dated 2 May 2023 which says that it increases the cash reserve ratio of the banks in Myanmar currency Kyat from current 3% to 3.5% during the maintaining minimum cash reserve limit period from 26 April 2023 to 23 May 2023.

Penrose Thitsa

MAI LAUNCHES DIRECT FLIGHTS BETWEEN YANGON AND CHENNAI, INDIA

Myanmar Airways International (MAI) has launched non-stop flights between Yangon and Chennai, India, according to Hindustantimes.

The airline's Embraer E190LR aircraft with a seating capacity of 98 seats, will operate between the two cities, with six seats in business class and 92 in economy. Chennai is now the fourth Indian city to be served by MAI, after Delhi, Kolkata, and Gaya.

The flights will operate every Saturday, departing from Yangon at 8 am local time and arriving in Chennai at 10:15 am. The return flight from Chennai will leave at 11:15 am and arrive in Yangon at 3:15 pm.

The city of Chennai, previously known as Madras, serves as the capital of Tamil Nadu, the southern-most state in India.

Myanmar Airways International currently operates in 18 international destinations and 18 domestic destinations, with seamless interline arrangements with 34 carriers. The airline is represented by the STIC Travel Group in the country.

INDONESIA'S KADIN EXPLORES RENEWABLE ENERGY TRADE AND INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES WITH MYANMAR

Indonesia's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Kadin) is currently exploring trade and investment opportunities with Myanmar, particularly in the development of new and renewable energy ecosystems, reported Antara, an Indonesian news agency.

While visiting Myanmar, Arsjad Rasjid, the Head and Chair of the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC), emphasized the important role of the private sector in establishing sustainable energy investments and trade relations that would contribute to achieving ASEAN's economic growth and the net-zero emissions commitment by 2060.

According to Rasjid, Myanmar and Indonesia possess potential resources for various forms of renewable energy, such as solar, wind, hydro, bioenergy, geothermal, and sea energy.

In addition, the ASEAN-BAC delegation discussed priority issues and legacy programs, including the ASEAN Business Entity legacy project that was launched during the chairmanship of ASEAN-BAC Indonesia.

Meanwhile, Indonesian businesses expressed their interest in collaborating with Myanmar in the electric vehicle (EV) and battery industry. This is due to Myanmar's abundance of critical minerals, including dysprosium and terbium, which are essential for creating lightweight EVs.



FEELING THE HEAT

A man uses an umbrella to shelter from the sun on a jetty in Yangon.

Photo: AFP

IN FOCUS



CHINLONE FROM MYANMAR AND OTHER UNUSUAL SPORTS AT THE SEA GAMES



Myanmar team badminton players in action at the SEA Games.
Photo: AFP

Southeast Asian athletes will vie for dominance in more than 30 sports in Phnom Penh from 5 to 17 May, in everything from athletics and football to jet ski, obstacle races and badmington.

The SEA Games has a flexible programme which includes sports in the hosts' favour and also allows for regional and newer disciplines.

One of the unusual regional sports is Myanmar's Chinlone. Chinlone is essentially a footballer's game of "keepy-uppy", but played with a woven cane ball by teams with deft touch, balletic grace and physical invention.

Hugely popular in the villages of Myanmar, it is a game of team cooperation. Six players keep the ball off the ground using any part of their body except their hands, with players performing flips as they kick the ball high into the air.

Chinlone's idiosyncrasies, as well as its focus on form and artistry, meant rules had to be crafted for its introduction to the Games in Naypyidaw in 2013 - such as the introduction of an opposition, scoring system and defined playing area.

In each match, two teams perform 10-minute sets, which are scored individually. First to win two

sets takes the match.

Three other unusual sports at these games are:

KUN BOKATOR

Believed to date back more than 1,000 years to the armies of the Khmer empire, which spread across much of Southeast Asia, Kun Bokator is perhaps the most quintessentially Cambodian martial art.

The graceful style, incorporating elbow blows, shin strikes, locks and grapples, makes its SEA Games debut just a year after being inscribed on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and so finds itself in rude health only decades after nearly being erased.

It barely survived the Khmer Rouge regime of the 1970s, but Kun Bokator has since won new followers among Cambodians keen to preserve their culture - UNESCO called it "an embodiment of Cambodia's social, cultural and religious values".

Cambodia will have an obvious advantage in Kun Bokator, but among foreigners looking to beat their hosts at their own game is Philippine MMA star Mark Striegl.

TEQBALL

In contrast to the ancient, locally rooted Kun Bokator, Teqball was invented as recently as 2012, in Hungary.

Played on a specially curved table, it is a mash-up of football and table tennis, requiring agility, stamina and acrobatic overhead kicks.

Top international football teams including Spain and Portugal bond over games of Teqball during downtime at training, and legends such as Ronaldinho have become ambassadors for the game.

It will be a demonstration sport at the SEA Games, as it seeks medal recognition at other sports events around the world.

ARNIS

The stick-wielding martial art of the Philippines is back again in 2023, having only made appearances in 2005 and 2019, when the country hosted the Games.

In arnis, two players in body armour and helmets try to hit each other with a baton made of ratan.

In the anyo discipline, individual performers don traditional dress for choreographed routines with weapons.

Arnis and Kun Bokator are not the only national martial arts on display this month.

There is Vovinam - the acrobatic style with roots in Vietnam's independence struggle - and Indonesia's pencak silat.

AFP



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